



CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: This article analyzes the cultural identity of English phraseological units from a linguocultural and semantic perspective. Phraseological units reflect the historical experience, lifestyle, professional activities, social values, and cultural heritage of English-speaking peoples. The connection between phraseological meaning and cultural context is revealed using the example of units such as carry coals to Newcastle, a baker's dozen, learn the ropes, a loose cannon, a level playing field. The results show that cultural competence, along with linguistic knowledge, is important for a complete understanding of phraseological units.

Keywords: phraseological unit, linguoculture, cultural identity, idiomatic meaning, cultural connotation.

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication for society but also a system that preserves its historical and cultural experience. This connection between language and culture is particularly evident in phraseological units. Phraseological units have been formed over a long period of historical development and can contain information about the daily life, professions, customs, geographical environment, and social values of a people. The general meaning of a phraseological unit is often not equal to the sum of the lexical meanings of individual words in its composition. Therefore, even if a learner of a foreign language knows all the components of a unit, they may not fully understand its content. In addition to language knowledge, knowledge of the historical and cultural context is also important.

For example, the phrase carry coals to Newcastle, when interpreted literally, means “to carry coal to Newcastle”. To fully understand its meaning of “to do unnecessary or excessive work”, it is necessary to know that the city of Newcastle was historically famous for its coal industry and trade. Such examples demonstrate the close relationship between phraseological semantics and cultural knowledge.

Phraseological units are distinguished from other lexical units by their semantic integrity, relatively stable composition, and figurative meaning. C. Fernando notes that in idiomatic units, the relationship between the general meaning and their components is manifested at different levels [1; 30-36-p.].



For this reason, while the meaning of some phraseological units can be understood through their structural components, understanding others requires additional historical or cultural knowledge. A. P. Cowie shows that their semantic and communicative features are important in the formation and use of phraseological units [2; 1-6-p.]. Since a certain part of phraseological units is formed as a result of a long historical process, they also preserve the social and cultural experience of previous periods. From this point of view, the phraseological fund can be evaluated as one of the layers reflecting the cultural memory of the language community.

The national-cultural character of English phraseology is particularly evident in units involving geographical names. Carry coals to Newcastle is a prime example. Newcastle was one of the regions in Britain historically known for its coal mining and trading. Therefore, carrying more coal to a place where there is a lot of coal was imagined as an unnecessary action, and over time, this combination began to mean “doing extra or useless work”. Here, the toponym Newcastle serves as a component that carries historical and economic information in addition to a simple place name. The phrase Send someone to Coventry is also one of the units associated with the British historical and cultural environment. In modern English, it is used in the sense of intentionally ignoring or socially excluding someone. Although there are several historical explanations for the origin of the unit, the preservation of the geographical name Coventry within it indicates the connection of the phraseology with historical memory.

Cultural experience related to professional and economic life is also reflected in English phraseology. The unit A baker's dozen means “thirteen”. Its formation is linked to the historical practice of baking and the bread trade in England. To ensure that the quantity or weight of the product did not fall below the specified norm, the bakers added one more product to the twelve. As a result, this practice has become a stable linguistic unit. Knowing the historical basis of the unit allows us to explain why it represents the number thirteen. The history of British seafaring has also left a significant mark on the phraseological fund of the English language. For example, learn the ropes is used in today's English to mean learning how to perform a task or activity. The figurative basis of unity is associated with the ropes on the ship and the practical knowledge necessary to manage them correctly. The specific movement related to seafaring later became generalized and shifted to the meaning of studying the basic rules of any activity.

A loose cannon also has an image associated with seafaring. A heavy unfastened gun could have moved across the ship's deck, posing a serious threat to the crew and the vessel. In modern English, this unit is used to refer to



a person whose behavior is difficult to predict or control, who can cause problems for others. In this example, the image associated with the historical object and situation acquired a new socially evaluative meaning.

In English phraseology, units related to sports are also actively encountered. A level playing field refers to a situation where equal and fair opportunities exist for all participants. The image of equal conditions on the sports field has been transferred to social and economic relations. Move the goalposts is used in the sense of making it difficult to achieve the goal by changing the requirements or rules during a process. In the semantics of these units, concepts specific to sports culture have become a means of expressing broader social situations. Cultural content is not limited to units directly related to Britain's national history. The English phraseological fund also includes units related to the Bible, ancient mythology, and the common European cultural heritage. For example, a good Samaritan means a person who gives selfless help to a person in need. Although the unit is associated with the biblical story of goodness and help, it is also widely used in modern English outside of a religious context.

Achilles' heel, on the other hand, dates back to ancient Greek mythology and represents the weakest point of a person, organization, or system. Such units did not originate from the direct historical experience of the English people, but they were absorbed into the English language and became an integral part of its modern phraseological system. This situation shows that the cultural system of the language also assimilates other cultural sources. A. Wierzbicka, studying the relationship between linguistic semantics and cultural values, emphasizes that linguistic units reflect the cultural experience of society and ways of classifying the world [3; 1-7-p.] D. Dobrovolskij and E. Piirainen also note the importance of cultural knowledge in the analysis of figurative language units. [4; 17–23-p.]. Therefore, the cultural content of a phraseological unit is manifested not only in its historical origin, but also in its figurative basis and connotative features.

Some phraseological units in the English language and their cultural foundations can be summarized as follows:

Phraseological unit	Figurative meaning	Cultural source	Cultural association
carry coals to Newcastle	to do something unnecessary	British industrial history	Newcastle coal trade
send someone to Coventry	to deliberately ignore or exclude someone	British history	Coventry



a baker's dozen	a group of thirteen	occupational tradition	traditional baking practice
learn the ropes	to learn how a job or activity works	maritime tradition	sailing and ship operation
a loose cannon	an unpredictable or uncontrollable person	maritime tradition	an unsecured cannon on a ship
a level playing field	a situation providing equal opportunities	sport	fair competitive conditions
move the goalposts	to change rules or requirements unfairly	sport	changing the position of a goal
a good Samaritan	a person who helps others selflessly	Biblical tradition	the Good Samaritan
Achilles' heel	a weak or vulnerable point	classical mythology	the myth of Achilles

The units in the table show that the cultural sources of the English phraseological fund are diverse. In addition to units directly related to British geography and industrial history, seafaring, professional activities, sports, religious traditions, and ancient heritage are also reflected in the phraseological system. In his corpus-based research, R. Moon analyzes the semantic and pragmatic features of fixed and idiomatic expressions in real speech and shows the need to study them in connection with the context [5; 3-9-p.]

The cultural character of phraseological units is also important in the study and translation of a foreign language. A literal translation of a unit may not fully convey its cultural connotation in another language. For example, the historical association associated with Newcastle may be lost when conveying the meaning of carry coals to Newcastle to another language. Therefore, in addition to the lexical composition of the unit, the translator must also take into account its communicative function and cultural content. Z. Kövecses's research on culture and figurative conceptualization also shows that the same or similar concepts can be expressed through different images in different cultures [6; 2-7-p.] Thus, the cultural identity of English phraseological units is manifested in their historical origin, structural components, figurative foundations, and connotative meanings. In addition to being modern communicative units of the language, phraseological units also serve as a means of preserving certain elements of past social and cultural experience in



modern speech.

Conclusion

The results of the analysis showed that historical, geographical, professional and cultural factors played an important role in the formation of phraseological units in English. The historical-geographical environment of Britain is preserved in units such as carry coals to Newcastle and send someone to Coventry, professional traditions in a baker's dozen, and the experience of seafaring in phraseological units such as learn the ropes and a loose cannon. Units based on sports, the Bible, and ancient mythology demonstrate that the cultural sources of the English phraseological fund are even broader. The cultural content of phraseological units is not limited to their origin, but is also reflected in their figurative and connotative semantics. Therefore, when understanding and translating phraseological units, it is necessary to consider their lexical meaning as well as their historical and cultural context. In this regard, English phraseology is an important linguistic layer that reflects the interdependence of language and culture and preserves the cultural experience of different periods.

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